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Meeting of the States Parties to the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production and Stockpiling of Bacteriological (Biological) and Toxin Weapons and on Their Destruction

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Procedures, including the establishment and use of the assistance database, to improve the prompt and efficient response without preconditions to a request of assistance by a State Party under Article VII, and coordination and cooperation among States Parties and with relevant international and regional organizations such as World Health Organization (WHO), World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE), Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), as appropriate

Strengthening Cooperation among States Parties and Relevant International Organizations in Response to Deliberate Spread of Infectious Diseases

Submitted by Japan

Co-sponsored by the Netherlands and the United Kingdom

I. Introduction

1. Since its entry into force, the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production and Stockpiling of Bacteriological (Biological) and Toxin Weapons and their Destruction (hereinafter "BWC") has played a significant role in the elimination of biological and toxin weapons while also working as an effective deterrent. Although the BWC is effective, its effectiveness could be further strengthened when combined with other frameworks and measures.

2. This working paper recommends strengthening collaboration between the BWC and international organizations such as the World Health Organization (WHO), the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE) and the United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) in support of States Parties which are exposed to emergency as a result of possible violation of the Convention.

II. The Need for Collaboration

3. In such a case as sudden spread of infectious disease, it is hard to determine at the initial stage whether the event has occurred naturally, accidentally or has been caused intentionally.

4. Typically, experts in relevant fields such as doctors and epidemiologists would be dispatched to detect pathogens, provide medical treatment and identify the route of infection. As the outcome of use of biological weapons could cause a public health emergency, it is important that experts in relevant fields are aware of up-to-date information and trends related to biological threats in addition to ordinary public, animal, or plant health issues.

5. At the Seventh Review Conference in 2011, States Parties recognized that health and security issues are interrelated at both the national and international levels. The Conference highlighted the importance of pursuing initiatives in this area through effective cooperation and sustainable partnerships. The Conference noted the importance of ensuring that efforts undertaken are effective irrespective of whether a disease outbreak is naturally occurring or deliberately caused.

6. During the Intersessional Period from 2012 to 2016 and at the Meeting of the States Parties (MSP) in 2017, some States Parties have emphasized the importance of coordination with the WHO, OIE and FAO at an early stage of the outbreak. It would be useful to discuss specific measures to strengthen cooperation with these international organizations throughout the intersessional program 2018 to 2020.

III. Case with WHO

7. As the International Health Regulations (2005) states, WHO is prepared to assist and respond to a public health emergency regardless of the cause whether it is a natural or deliberate outbreak. In order to prepare for all hazards, WHO established an Emergency Response Framework (ERF) -second edition- in 2017 to respond to all sorts of public health emergencies. To date, ERF has not been activated to respond to the deliberate outbreak of infectious virus and toxins. However, this initiative opened a new window for WHO to begin more robust collaboration with BWC States Parties in the BWC framework.

IV. Case with OIE

8. OIE organized a global conference on "Biological Threat Reduction" in June 2015 and in Nov 2017, reconfirming the importance of collaboration among different stakeholders in order to respond to biological threats. Discussion focused on enhancing cooperation among relevant international organizations to take action to strengthen prevention, detection and response (ability) mechanisms for public health and animal disease regardless of whether it is intentionally, accidentally or naturally caused. It is notable that the OIE's Biological Threat Reduction Strategy, which was endorsed at the 2015 conference, stated that the response to disease is the same whether it is directed against natural infection, or deliberate or accidental release.

V. The Role of ISU in Article VII activities

9. At the Sixth Review Conference in 2006, the Implementation Support Unit (ISU) was established and given a mandate which included, inter alia, providing administrative

support to meetings, implementation, universalization of the Convention and exchange of confidence-building measures (CBMs).

10. This mandate was renewed at the Seventh Review Conference. In addition to the tasks given at the Sixth Review Conference, the ISU was requested to establish and administer a database for assistance requests and offers, and facilitate the associated exchange of information among States Parties, and support the implementation by the States Parties of the decisions and recommendations of the Seventh Review Conference.

11. In the last intersessional period between 2012-2015, the ISU has actively played an important role in keeping contact with relevant international organizations such as WHO, OIE, FAO, INTERPOL and the International Committee of the Red Cross. The Meetings of Experts (MX) and MSP, and a Review Conference in last 5 years have seen the participation of their staff and they also participated in relevant workshops.

12. There has clearly been increased communication with relevant international organizations due to the ISU's enthusiastic efforts and regular communication. These close communications are important as States Parties can learn from the experiences of international organizations, in particular their successes and failures in managing various emergencies and providing support to States Parties. The effectiveness of the BWC could be further enhanced and strengthened by establishing an effective coordination procedure among States Parties, relevant international organizations in the event of the incident involving biological agents.

VI. Proposal

13. The awareness of the importance of the cooperation with international organizations has grown among stakeholders and numerous initiatives have already been taken by State Parties and the ISU. In order to further facilitate cooperation, this working paper recommends that the States Parties consider the following in the intersessional process in order to strengthen preparedness for biological threats:

(a) continue to take advantage of the knowledge and experience of experts from relevant international organizations such as WHO, OIE and FAO in future discussions within the BWC on science and technology developments and on assistance, response and preparedness in view of effectively responding to sudden outbreaks. The relevant international organizations as well as the ISU are also encouraged to report their relevant activities in the BWC meetings as required. By doing so, States Parties and relevant international organizations will be better able to take necessary countermeasures if required;

(b) consider coordination procedure between the BWC States Parties and relevant international organizations in the event of a public, animal or plant health emergency so that smooth and swift action and exchange of information are possible; and

(c) encourage and support the ISU to facilitate coordination and cooperation among States Parties and relevant international organizations to effectively respond to public health emergencies caused by violation of the Convention. Increased human resources and mandate may be required for the ISU with relevant experience in such organizations.

14. We consider that the measures recommended above could enhance the capability to counter outbreaks of human, animal or plant disease, whether natural, accidental or deliberate and thereby achieve effectively the requirements of the BWC.